

REMARKS

Reconsideration of the application is respectfully requested in view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks.

The Examiner has rejected claims 1, and 4-9 under 35 U.S.C. 112 second paragraph.

Claim 1 has been amended to overcome this rejection.

The Examiner has rejected claims 1 and 4-9 under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent no. 6,264,251 in view of Japanese Patent application publication no. 2000-130662.

Claim 1 has been amended such that it is respectfully submitted that claim 1 is now patentable over the above cited references taken either singly or in combination.

For example, with these amendments, each of the flange members has both end portions that are respective thin portions, such that neighboring flange members can be connected to each other, wherein the thickness of the split flange is constant in a circumferential direction upon assembling.

In addition, these flange members, as amended in claim 1, now have recesses for holding the flared portion of a pipe therein, such that these recesses form a circumferential recess at an inner circumferential side face upon assembling.

Claim 1 as amended describes these end portions as having slant portions.

Furthermore, when these flange members are connected together, the joint portions of the recesses may be in contact with the inclined faces thereof.

Neither one of the references shows the formation of a recess in the flanges. More particularly, neither one of the references shows a flange having a recess that is formed as a channel as claimed in claim 12.

These recesses are important because they can be used to receive the flared portions of the pipes.

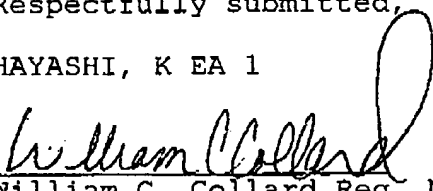
Furthermore, as amended, claim 1 now states that there are slant portions that are disposed at end portions of the flange members. Thus, when these flange members are coupled together the joint portions of the recesses may be in contact with the inclined faces which are formed from the slant portions. Neither Kunsmann

nor the Japanese reference disclose slant portions which form inclined faces. Therefore it is respectfully submitted that claim 1 and dependent claims 10-12 are patentable over the above cited references taken either singly or in combination.

A prompt notification of allowability is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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I hereby certify that this correspondence is being sent by facsimile transmission to the U.S.P.T.O. to Patent Examiner V. Patel at Group No.3679 , to 1-703-872-9306 on October 24, 2005.

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